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8

Models of personality in Buddhist psychology

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Introduction

A comprehensive framework for psychology should address a wide spectrum of applications. At one end, it should identify the limiting factors of the ordinary psyche and the scope of the perfected state that humans can realize. In this regard, it should also comprehend the profound mystical experiences of the practitioners of various spiritual traditions. At the other end, it should cover the pathological experiences of those struggling to cope with the travails of the mundane world. In the middle, it should also be applicable in the analysis of psychological tendencies and developmental opportunities of conventionally 'normal' individuals. Buddhist psychology, with its balanced approach combining structured rational analysis and first person accounts of direct yogic experience, is of great relevance in contributing toward the formation of a comprehensive framework for psychology.

Buddhist psychology is both a psychology of transformation and a theory of cognition. As a psychology of transformation, it aims to develop the innate psychic potential of every being to its perfection. The ordinary state of being is 'flawed' or pathological in the sense that one works with limited perceptions of the world and undergoes cycles of suffering and psychological tension in ceaseless attempts to cope with and respond to the world. These attempts fail to produce everlasting happiness because the perceptions about oneself and the world, which one formulates as the basis for action, are discordant with one's true nature. Buddhist psychology aims to transcend this entrapment. It begins the endeavour by analyzing the root cause behind this pathology. In the absence of such an understanding, one might go after an enlightenment ideal with the same pathological tendencies that tie one to the miseries of ordinary being; and thus remain contented with an intermediate state of blissful experience, where the tendencies leading to future suffering may still be dormant.

The goal of the Buddhist psychology of transformation can be viewed as triple-fold, corresponding to the three scopes of motivation on the Buddhist path.[1] The lower goal is about coping with the ordinary state of being while minimizing suffering. The middle goal is the ever-lasting liberation (*vimukti*) from suffering by eliminating afflictive tendencies. The higher goal is to achieve complete and

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perfect awakening (*saṃbodhi*).[2] The process of awakening involves the attainment of total perfection in all dimensions of being, with their transformation into pristine wisdom (*jñāna*). The ultimate spiritual attainment on the Buddhist path, as described in the Great Perfection (*mahā-sandhi-yoga*, Tibetan: *rdzogs chen*) teachings, is to realize the primordial purity and spontaneous perfection of all appearances. This realization is inseparably coalesced (*yuganaddha*) with a display of unceasing compassion. This is a state completely transcending ordinary psyche, without grounding in or clinging to its distorted projections and being able to appreciate the truth 'as it is'.

Buddhist psychology is also a theory of cognition. This is an inevitable part of Buddhist exploration since the higher goal of Buddhist training is the attainment of *saṃbodhi* that eliminates all cognitive 'errors'.[3] The view of cognition that evolves through Buddhist psychology is that of the co-emergence of the person and the world. The distinction between inner and outer vanishes on deep analysis of the process of experiencing. Thus the scope of 'personality' in Buddhist studies includes the entire sphere of experience covering not only the person, but also the world as perceived by the person. The study of the dynamics of this co-emergence equips Buddhist psychology with ways of altering the person and the world thus brought forth. This knowledge is applied in eliminating the cognitive 'errors' of the ordinary state of being, and thus in relating to appearances in a whole new way as the person progresses on the path to omniscience.

An important theme running throughout Buddhist psychology is the five dimensions of underlying capabilities in which various aspects of personality and the awakened state are understood. At the mundane level, the manifestation of these capabilities in its distorted forms appears as the five aggregates (*skandha*) of personality. The aggravation of these distortions leads to five afflictions (*kleśa*), and to various psychological realms of experience. Through perfect awakening, clarified aspects of these capabilities manifest as the five aspects of the fully awakened omniscient wisdom (*buddha-jñāna*). These five clarified aspects are:

1. Seeing reality 'as it is',
2. Unperturbed clarity in knowing all phenomena,
3. Perfect distinction of all details of phenomena,
4. Sensing the happiness and suffering of all beings with the experience of one-taste, transcending ordinary pleasure and pain, and
5. The creativity of spontaneously-accomplishing actions.[4]

Buddhist psychology has formulated various ways of analyzing personality. These could be termed as 'the models of personality'. These psychological models are valuable in studying a variety of experiences like the conventional experience of ordinary beings, of those in the stages of the path to awakening, and the qualities of the fully awakened state. These models are also useful in analyzing experiences related to sleep, dream, death, after-death state, etc. In this chapter, various models of personality in Buddhist psychology are explored. The application of these models in understanding various psychological states and afflictions are also briefly touched upon.

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The three turnings of the Buddhist view

These psychological models are presented with their own specific scopes of application in various phases of Buddhist teaching. The opinion among various Buddhist schools differs regarding how to view these phases together. A brief introduction to the three phases of Buddhist philosophy and the position taken in this chapter regarding an integral view is necessary before delving into the details of the models.

The evolution of Buddhist philosophy took place in three distinct periods renowned in Mahāyāna literature as 'the three turnings of the wheel of dharma'.[5] The first turning comprises the Buddha's teachings (as present in the Pali canon) that he gave to a wide audience. The second and third turning teachings were delivered to disciples who had already made progress on the path to awakening. The second turning, which became widely known around the second century, is centred on the *Prajñā-pāramita-sūtrās* of the Buddha. Madhyamaka philosophy was developed by *Nāgārjuna* based on these *sutras*, and was further established through the treatises of scholars like *Āryadeva, Śāntideva, Candrakirti* and *Śāntarakṣita* (2nd–8th century CE). The third turning is based on a vast array of *sutras* such as the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra, Sandhinirmocana-sūtra, Lankāvatāra-sūtra* and the *Avatāmsaka-sūtra*. Maitreya, Asanga, Vasubandhu and others (4th century CE onwards), developed the third turning views further, through their treatises (*śāstra*) and commentaries. The second and third turning views were extended further in the teachings of Buddhist *tantrās* (*Vajrayāna*).

In the first turning, focus is on the most immediate problem of the individual—the suffering nature of ordinary existence and the possibility of going beyond. The suffering in this context is not just the apparent forms of suffering like those due to physical pain, emotional turmoil and boredom. Suffering in its broader context is the underlying psychological tension that pervades even happy states of mind. It is the struggle to cling to mistaken identities which keep drifting away like a mirage. Like the ecstatic experience of a narcotic addict while dipping into deeper agony, one expends enormous energy to create an island of happiness along with an ocean of underlying suffering. One sinks into deeper anguish as the island of ecstasy drifts away. The first turning teaches the recognition of the true nature of a person, as the way to freedom (*vimukti*) out of this mistaken struggle. In this context, the conventional personality is analyzed in great detail. The psychological models presented in this turning, analyze the constituents and operational dynamics of a person, in terms of underlying building blocks. This phase of Buddhist psychology is already finding applications in the modern context. The dialogues between Buddhist scholars, modern psychologists and cognitive scientists, as documented by Goleman (1997, 2004), shed light on this topic. Parallels between the decentralized view of mind developed in cognitive science, and the decentralized experience of personality emerging through mindfulness meditation in Buddhist traditions, were investigated by Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1993).

The second turning focuses on the ultimate nature of all phenomena including

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the building blocks of personality. The aim here is to remove the veil of knowables (*jñeyāraṇa*) toward perfect awakening (*saṃbodhi*), in addition to the removal of the veil of afflictions (*kleśāvaraṇa*) which aid in the movement towards liberation, from suffering (*vimukti*). The psyche exists not in isolation but is interwoven with the rest of the phenomenal world. An understanding of the true nature of all phenomena is necessary to realize omniscience. The separation between psychology and ontology disappears as one transcends objectivism and subjectivism, in this view of dependent co-arising of psyche and the world. The *Madhyamaka* view establishes the profound groundlessness (*śūnyatā*) where no phenomenon can be self-arising or self-sustaining in isolation with the rest of the world. While drawing parallels between the Madhyamaka view and their work on enactive cognitive science, Varela et al. (1993, p. 253) state:

> There is a profound discovery of groundlessness in our culture — in science, in the humanities, in society, and in the uncertainties of people's daily lives. ... Taking groundlessness as negative, as a loss, leads to a sense of alienation, despair, loss of heart, and nihilism. The cure that is generally espoused in our culture is to find a new grounding (or a return to older grounds).... In Buddhism, we have a case study showing that when groundlessness is embraced and followed through to its ultimate conclusions, the outcome is an unconditional sense of intrinsic goodness that manifests itself in the world as spontaneous compassion.

The third turning of the Buddhist view shows how the realization of the most profound truth of groundlessness becomes the experience of ultimate purity of appearances, with its spontaneously accomplishing nature manifesting as the all-encompassing display of compassion. If the second turning does not generate such an experience, one has not reached the correct understanding of groundlessness (*śūnyatā*). One mistakenly falls to either the shades of nihilism—with resulting fear, dullness or indifference; or to the shades of absolutism—with resulting ego-centric aggression, despair, or anesthetic complacence. The third turning guides the practitioner towards perfecting the profound realization of groundlessness, through stages of progressively pure experiences. A phenomenological description of stages in the path (*bodhisatva-bhūmi*) to *saṃbodhi* is given as far as words can capture it. It describes the potential for full awakening (*Tathāgatagarbha*) as innate to every being. An elaborate and sophisticated model of psychology is developed in this turning. This may be termed as the psychology of spiritual awakening. The third turning has not yet been significantly put to use in modern psychology. However, there is tremendous value in studying the third turning model of personality, while developing a modern psychology of spiritual transformation. In this chapter, the model of eight-fold collection deals with the third turning psychology.

Reification of the building blocks of the first turning led to the realist schools of Buddhist philosophy like Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika. Reification of certain elements of the psychological model of the third turning led to idealist interpretations to schools like Vijñānavāda and Yogācāra. If one is careful not to make such reifications, the three turnings together provide a consistent and comprehensive

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view. Many scholars of the Prajñā-pāramita tradition[6] of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism embrace such a view and accept all the three turnings. According to this view the three turnings are three phases of understanding. The first turning provides the phenomenology and psychology of mundane existence. The second turning presents the profound view of groundlessness that provides the ontological perspective. The third turning is the culmination where phenomenology and psychology of both mundane and enlightened experiences are seen in inseparable union with the ontological insight of the second turning. The approach taken in this chapter is such an integral perspective, with the philosophical basis of Madhyamaka. Influences of the second and third turning can be found in this chapter, even while discussing the first turning. This is intentional, and aims at bringing clarity to the whole theme from an integral perspective. With this approach, the models of personality from the first and third turnings become useful psychological tools, with varying subtlety and applications.

Model 1: The aggregate model of personality

The first turning presents two models for studying personality. The first is a schema of analyzing personality into its building blocks. According to this model, all experiences that arise as the continuum[7] of a person[8] are analyzed and categorized into five aggregates (*skandha*). The original aim of this model is to arrive at the realization of the ultimate nature of a person through direct observation of experiences in mindfulness meditation (*smṛti upastāna*, known popularly through the Pali term *sati-patthana*). This is the means to go beyond suffering produced by ego-clinging. The simplicity of this model along with the ease of direct observation makes it a good starting point to formulate the structure of personality. It also leads to the identification of five dimensions of capabilities that fuel the five categories of experiences. The aggregates are:

1. Form (*rūpa*): This is an experience that arises as a concretized and objectified view of phenomena. Form is not just the physical body of a person. According to Vasbandhu's *Abhidharma-kośa*[9] all forms, including the perceived external environment, belong to this aggregate. The objects of all five sense consciousnesses are considered to be forms—for example, shape and colour for the visual consciousness, and sound for the auditory consciousness. It also includes sense faculties. Asanga's *Abhidharma-samuccaya*[10] also categorizes the mental objects of perception like concepts and mental images into form.
2. Feeling (*vedanā*): This is an experience of a sensation that lies on the scale of painful (*duḥkha*), neutral and pleasurable (*sukha*). It is the subjective appreciation that senses suffering and happiness. It includes both sensual and mental feelings. The feeling aggregate only covers the basic feeling that comes as part and parcel of an experience. The process of building up additional emotional states and observable reactions is not in itself a part of feeling. However, such build-ups also result in feeling.

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For example, becoming anxious is not a feeling, but anxiousness is experienced with its associated feeling of pain.

3. Perception (*saṃjña*): This is an experience of recognizing something within the field of cognition. This recognition is due to predispositions and familiarity, and is not a process of inference. However, the process of inference can lead to a generalized image corresponding to the direct experience under investigation. The experience of recognizing the generalized image would belong to the aggregate of perception. Perception could be about labelling a form to be a specific object, viewing a situation to be either desirable or threatening, perceiving a quality in an object, etc.
4. Formation (*saṃskāra*): This is an experience additionally fabricated in the continuum of a person in response to other experiences. Thus, the aggregate of formation is the reactive and responsive aspect of personality. The process of intellectualization (*buddhi*) through which one analyzes and infers is part of this aggregate. Emotional build-ups and behavioural aspects are also formations of various mental episodes (*caitta*, also known as *caitasika*) arising in dependence upon each other. In addition, through conditioning, the context of experiencing and directing attention into or away from specific aspects in the sphere of experience, formations alter future experiences.
5. Consciousness (*vijñāna*): It is the experience of being conscious of an object of experience. *Vijñāna* literally means 'qualified knowing' in which there are three spheres—the knower, the object of knowledge, and the process of knowing. In the first turning model, *vijñāna* is of six kinds—the mental consciousness and the five sense consciousnesses. Buddhist psychology treats these six as different types of *vijñāna*, since they know their objects through their uncommon aspects—for example, knowing the aspect of shape and colour for eye consciousness, and sound for ear consciousness. The experience of mental consciousness is about being conscious of concepts, mental images, recognitions, feelings, emotions, etc.

Vijñāna is to be contrasted with pristine wisdom (*jñāna*) knowing reality 'as it is'. Unlike *jñāna*, *vijñāna* is qualified and it remains specific through its entangled nature, where the prior experiences in the continuum colours the way knowledge arises. The field of knowing and the specific ways of 'seeing' are continually perturbed and modified in the process of knowing. So are the modifications of other aggregates too. The aggregates of feelings, perceptions and formations arise as the subjective aspects, and the aggregate of forms arises as the objective aspect, in the context of experience provided by *vijñāna*.

The aggregates are momentary experiences arising in an interdependent way and a person is none other than a continuum of such experiences. Each of the aggregates is closely related to and contains other aggregates. For example, the aggregate of perception could arise as the recognition of either an aggregate of form, feeling, formation or *vijñāna*. There could be a perception of feeling or vice-versa, a feeling of perception. Similarly, experience of form need not always correspond to

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the appearances of material forms. It can also arise as the objectification of feeling, perception, formation or *vijñāna*. This corresponds to the objectification of mind (*citta*) as the agent behind experiences. Thus, *citta* can be viewed as the objective view of the subjective aspect of experience.

Model 2: The network model of mental continuum

The model presented above analyzes personhood as a continuum of experiences belonging to five dimensions. The second model from the first turning scriptures is that of main-mind (*citta*) and mental episodes (*caitta*, also known as *caitasika*). The cognitive and behavioural dynamics of a person are looked upon in this model as the interplay of mental episodes in an ever-changing continuum of the complex of *citta* and *caitta*. Personality traits evolve through this complex. This complex of *citta-caitta* corresponds closely to the meaning of the English word 'mind'.

The notion of *vijñāna* in the aggregate model and *citta* in this model, are synonymous to the extent that *vijñāna*—with its triple-fold division of the agent of knowing, the object of knowledge, and the knowing itself—and *citta* including its content, are mutually inclusive. The entity being studied by various terms like *vijñāna*, *citta* and *manas*[11] is the same. However, the perspectives from which they are looked upon are different. While *vijñāna* emphasizes experiences, *citta* emphasizes the apprehension of experiences as if through an agent.

In the *citta-caitta* model, the main-mind (*citta*) is the bare apprehension.[12] The stream of *citta* changes continuously as various objects, along with the apprehension of them, arise and vanish. The mental episodes are further apprehensions and reactions through the aggregates of feeling, perception and formation. In this model, the aggregate of form is considered as the content of *citta* and hence does not become an explicit element in the model.[13]

The actual types of mental episodes are numerous, while various scriptures enumerate around fifty. These are grouped into six categories. The first category is that of ever-present mental episodes accompanying each and every experience. These include contact (*sparśa*) between mind and its object, feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjña*), volition (*cetana*) and mental engagement (*manaskāra*).[14] *Manaskāra* is the mental episode that keeps the person attentive to any given object of appearance, and helps in engaging deeper into the object. The second category is the mental episodes that are essential in ascertaining the characteristics of the object being engaged with. These include interest (*chanda*), determination (*adhimokṣa*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), one-pointedness (*samādhi*)[15] and insight (*prajñā*). The third category is of wholesome mental episodes. These are desirable and indicative of a healthy personality. The fourth and fifth categories include the primary and secondary unwholesome mental episodes which are undesirable for a healthy personality. Unwholesome mental episodes have the potential to produce suffering. The sixth category consists of changeable mental episodes for which the wholesomeness depends upon the context.

As a person engages with an object, various mental episodes ripen, based on specific karmic tendencies. The manifestations of various mental episodes condition

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the mental continuum, making it either fertile or sterile for other mental episodes. For example, the unwholesome mental episode of bewilderment (*moha*) would weaken one-pointedness, and thus make the mental episode of insight shallower. As another example, there is less likelihood of the mental episode of anger arising in a mental continuum in which the mental episodes of patience are strengthened.

This model is considered important for mind training through meditation. Varying modes of using it are available, depending on the nature of the vehicle (Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna) that a person trains on. For example, the approach in Hinayāna, in general, is to apply mindfulness meditation to find and remove the causes that lead to unhealthy mental episodes. The approach in Mahāyāna is to cultivate an opposing mental episode as an antidote, such that the ground is sterile for unwholesome mental episodes. Such an approach works through understanding how the presence and strength of various mental episodes affect the enriching or diminishing of others.

Selflessness and emptiness

Due to their ever-changing nature, neither can phenomenal experiences on their own be a source of happiness or suffering, nor can they form a basis for permanent identity for the person. Clinging to experiences in this ever-changing continuum is the cause of suffering. As Asanga points out in *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (Trans. 2001), clinging could arise as a mistaken identification of self with experiences belonging to any of the five aggregates. It is a notion of 'I' around which other experiences are related as either favourable or threatening. Clinging to such notions provides mistaken frames of reference for actions, and binds the person to the cycle of suffering through discordant actions, causing undesired results.

Clinging to an experience of form arises with the mistaken notion of self as the body. Clinging to an experience of feeling (as in the bliss of *samādhi*) arises from the mistaken notion of self as the enjoyer experiencing its innate bliss. The perception of the label 'I' (as in 'I am') can be the basis for mistaken notion of a self as the perceiver at its own bare recognition (as in *asmitā samādhi*). The aggregate of formation is the basis for the mistaken notion of self as the agent behind action. A non-dual appearance of *vijñāna*, where no object of knowing is distinctly present, can be confused as the self experiencing its innate nature. Since all these experiences are constructed on the basis of various causes and conditions, attempts to cling to these experiences as self-nature lead to psychological tension and suffering. For example, the very attempt to cling to the bliss of meditation leads to anger and mental turbulence, when a disturbing stimulus shakes the person out of *samādhi*. Happiness is ever-lasting only when the basis is transformed (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*), leading to the co-emergence (*sahaja*) of peace with every sprout of experience.

In the first turning philosophy, various notions of self (*ātma*) are refuted through the view of not-self (*anātma*) to thoroughly eliminate all modes of clinging. The arising and subsiding of aggregates (including the subtler experiences in meditation) are observed to study their causes and conditions[16]. Direct recognition

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of the momentary nature of all aggregates leads to the realization of the lack of a permanent abiding ground for the person in aggregates. It also leads to the realization of how futile constructions around an impossible notion of self leads to suffering. This realization of not-self (*anātma*) leads to abandonment of all clinging and discordant actions arising out of mistaken identity, and thus to liberation from suffering. Experiences are no more in the nature of suffering, as the conditions for suffering cease through the cessation of mistaken impulses. The peace one reaches is no more the constructed bliss of a specific state of being, but an unconditional one that is co-emergent with every sprout of experience. Once the mental continuum undergoes such a transformation, the experience of the phenomenal world can no more be the cause of suffering.

Refutation of the above notions of self is not a total denial of conventional experiences of a person. The emphasis is on removing the root-ignorance that confusedly identifies and clings to some of these experiences in the continuum (including the so-called transcendental experiences), as the essential nature of a person.

The removal of mistaken notions about the self of a person is sufficient for freedom from suffering, but not for omniscience. The insight into the true nature of reality is essential for this. The *Madhyamaka* view based on the second turning explores the true nature of all phenomena and asserts the lack of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*). Madhyamaka recognizes that no phenomenon (including the notion of person and the constituent aggregates) can exist from its own side. Nāgārjuna invokes arguments of pure reason to establish the lack of inherent existence, the emptiness of all phenomena. Even the notions of causation, time, space, etc., cannot be established from their own side (*Mūla-madhyamaka-kārika*, Trans. 1995). A general idea about the doctrine of emptiness may be generated through an example. The existence of a table can be spotted neither in any of its parts like the platform or legs, nor as a separate and independent entity. A collection of all its parts does not become the table either, unless it is organized in a specific way that does a specific function to a perceiver. Hence, the collection of parts in itself does not contain any essential identity for the table. Many causes and conditions like the parts of the table, the designer, the carpenter and the user together give rise to the phenomenal experience of a table. Thus, the experience of table is a phenomenal appearance whose essence cannot be traced down to its components. The same argument could be extended deeper into its constituents like the platform and the legs to see that no object exists on its own. Even the perceiver that imputes a name to the object does not exist on its own, because the *citta* arises in dependence upon objects of experience.

The nature of appearances can be understood in terms of three concepts. These are emptiness (*śūnyatā*), conditional arising (*prattitya-samutpāda*) and dependent imputation (*upādāya-prajñāpti*). The first is the lack of inherent existence of phenomenal experiences from their own side. The second is about how the experiences of phenomena still arise through various causes and conditions based on other phenomena that are equally empty. Phenomenal experiences arise and vanish interdependently without any inherent self-support anywhere. Empty appearances

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of phenomena support each other. The third is about the phenomenal appearance of *citta* as an imputation of conceptual notions to the ever-changing flux of conditional arising, based on suitability. This leads to a contextual view of truth. An example may clarify this. When one recognizes the constant flow of water, one imputes the concept of river. Though the water in the river flows by continuously and there is no river other than the flowing water, through conceptual imputation one cognizes a river that does not flow away with every drop of water.

When all such imputations are pacified, it leads to the direct realization of the truth 'as it is' (*tathātā*) that is non-elaborated (*niṣprapañca*). It is the inseparable coalescence of phenomenal experiences with their ultimate essencelessness. This is also termed the void sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu*). The scholar-yogi of Tibet, Longchen Rabjampa explains:

> The appearance of all things of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is based on the causal process of interdependent origination. These appearances are undeniable. They are the unceasing natural play of voidness (*śūnyatā*) [emptiness], like the play of light, the play of eddies and waves on the water and the rustling of the leaves. All things of relative reality are this way. Thus because appearances are irrefutable, there is the relative [conventional] level of truth. On the ultimate level there are no validly cognized objects other than the one taste of the absence of all mental fabrications (*prapañca*). Ultimate reality transcends the division of subject and object. It is the underlying stratum, the unborn, pure mode of existence of the appearances of the relative level. Thus the two levels of truth are inseparable. (Trans. 1979, p. 15)

Longchen Rabjampa describes this coalesced nature of the void sphere of reality further in these poetic verses:

> Ultimate reality is the mandala [the sphere of experience] of the perfectly pure expanse of voidness. It is like a 'magic' mirror. What unimpededly appear on it are all phenomena (*dharma*) of relative reality, your mind included. These things appear naturally on this 'magic' mirror, through and to your mind. There is no third reality of a truly existing mind or objects juxtaposed to the ultimate reality of the mirror and the relative reality of the images in it. (Trans. 1979, p. 18)

Dynamics of experience

The sphere of experience of a person is a conditioned view arising through imputations into this void sphere of reality. This appears as the mind (*citta*) and its objects. This limited sphere of experience is conditioned by the specific context in which a person's mental continuum evolved. Experiences and reactions continuously modify this context. New appearances of objects and *citta* arise in this ever-changing context. Detailed understanding about this dynamics can be derived from the third turning and *vajrayāna* teachings.

This ever-changing context of experience is related to imprints (*vāsana*). Imprint is like a thin fragrance left behind after the scent has evaporated, or like a stain still left behind on a cloth after many washes. The stains left by various experiences

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blend together in forming the context for newer experiences. *Vāsana* acts like a filter that constraints the breadth and depth to which a *citta* penetrates reality. It leads to the formation of a conceptually projected view of reality that prevents further penetration into the true nature. This results in certain grounding of the awareness (*vidyā*), making the experience specific to a frame of reference. This specific frame of reference results in distorted contextual knowing (*vijñāna*) as opposed to the pristine wisdom (*jñāna*) that an ungrounded awareness with its omniscient expanse and unhindered penetration can achieve. A few examples would help in making this clear. A room might be pleasant for a person, too hot for another, and too cold for yet another—all at the same time. Past experiences and expectations lead to this difference. Depending on *vāsana*, one penetrates reality differently and sees either a river that is unchanging or the flowing water. There can be similarities in *vāsana* for an entire species of beings. Thus, humans experience a lawn to be beautiful to watch, and soft to touch. A dog might not appreciate the beauty, though it still finds it soft to roll on. A cow might find the same lawn tasty! The structure of the human eye that constrains the visual consciousness to objects of certain dimensionality (not seeing microscopic structures for example), may be said to be a bodily *vāsana* that humans carry by being embodied into a certain cognitive structure. Removing all *vāsana* is essential as part of breaking the veil of knowables (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) towards omniscience. This is called the veil of knowables since the conceptually projected images of knowables obstruct the knowledge of the truth as it is.

Another stream of modification in the mental continuum of a person is the urge for action that arises as the ripening of karmic tendencies (*karma-bīja*). The distinction between *vāsana* and *karma-bīja* is thin, since the very appearance of an experience involves an imputation which is an implicit action. In addition, actions lead to modification of the context of experience. Similarly, the very urge to act arises in the context of experiencing. However, it may be termed that *vāsana* predominantly deals with how experiences arise and *karma-bīja* about how a person reacts to experiences.

Karmic tendencies are habitual associations made in the mental continuum between situations, actions and results from the past. For example, having responded many times in the past in a certain style creates a seemingly automatic urge to respond in a similar style when such situations arise again. Similarly, having experienced immediate happiness due to a particular action many times in the past, creates an urge to act in such a way again. For example, venting out anger might give immediate relief to a person, though it leads to unhappy after-effects like a disturbed state of mind and angry retaliations from others. This might lead to the development of a habitual association between venting out of anger and the experience of immediate relief, further leading to similar urges in future. Once a person habituates with letting out anger whenever the urge arises, the mental continuum turns into a fertile ground for the mental episodes of anger to arise often with little provocation. Karmic tendencies from a multitude of experiences reinforce each other. This may be viewed as a non-linear dynamics that sustains and reinforces a tendency till it drives the person into experiencing a karmic result.[17]

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The aggregate of formation arises from the ripening of karmic tendencies based on situational conditions.

Every moment of awareness arises with an innate creative potential. However, the karmic tendencies severely condition and narrow down the way this creativity manifests. Karmic tendencies mixed with root-ignorance about selflessness lead to afflictive obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*) that bond a person to the experiences of suffering.

Model 3: The eight-fold collection

In the third turning philosophy, personality is analyzed in terms of the context and the structure of experiences, by focusing on the experience of knowing (*vijñāna*). The formation of personality is explained as the dynamic interplay of:

1. The ever-changing continuum of the context of experience,
2. The basic structuring of experiences in that context,
3. The formation of the sense of self, and
4. The arising and vanishing of specific experiences.

In this model, personality is viewed as an eight-fold collection consisting of seven consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) and the defiled mentality (*kḷṣṭa-manas*). The seven are the all-ground consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) along with its projections, through the mental and sense consciousnesses. According to the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* (Asanga, Trans. 2006), the mental and sense consciousnesses are also known as functional consciousnesses (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*). The dynamics of the eight-fold collection is described in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*:

> Like waves that rise on the ocean stirred by the wind, dancing and without interruption, the *ālaya*-ocean in a similar manner is constantly stirred by the winds of objectivity, and is seen dancing about with the *vijñānas* which are the waves of multiplicity. (Trans. 1999, p. 42)

The eight-fold collection is as explained below:

(1) All-ground consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*): This is the limited sphere of experience of a person that arises as a distorted view of the void sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu*) through dependent imputation. *Ālaya-vijñāna* forms the foundation for embodied cognition and defines the basic structure of all experiences. The *vāsana* and karmic tendencies (*karma-bija*) lead to a biased perspective and structuring, and thus provide a context for all experiences in this eight-fold collection. Thus, *ālaya-vijñāna* is also regarded as the store house of *vāsanas* and karmic tendencies (*vāsanāparibhāvita* and *sarvabijaka*). However, it is neither the permanent identity of a person nor a form of collective unconscious. Continuous build-up and discharge of karmic tendencies cause the ever-changing nature of *ālaya-vijñāna*. Though *ālaya-vijñāna* always provides the context to all experiences, a person in ordinary states of awareness does not become conscious of the subtle and direct experience of *ālaya-vijñāna* because the gross nature of functional consciousnesses dominates in such states.

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(2) Defiled mentality (*kḷṣṭa-manas*): The mentality (*manas*) is the subjective aspect experienced as the enjoyer (or as perceiver, knower, actor) of objects. The mentality is defiled because it is constantly conceited with the idea of 'I am'. From the sphere of experience presented by *ālaya-vijñāna*, the defiled mentality arises as an experience of 'I'. Ācārya Mañjuśrīmitra, a renowned master in the lineage of *Mahāsandhi-yoga* teachings, explains:

> Depending on the power (*prabhāva*) of various *vāsanas* from the manifold formative forces of *karma*, the potential for experience appears forth as objects and subjective being (*ātma-bhāva*)... By taking the continuum of accumulating *vāsana* as the basis, mentality (*manas*) arises as an experience of *ātma* that does not exist. (Trans. 2001, p. 117)

As Asanga explains in *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (Trans. 2001), the notion of 'I' is conceited with the four defilements of—the perception of self (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*), self-love (*ātma-sneha*), the feeling of 'I am' (*asmimāna*) and the ignorance about the true nature of self (*avidyā*). The defiled mentality conceives a limited identity within the sphere of experience as 'mine' and provides a basis for emotional afflictions to arise trying to protect and enrich that identity. The thoughts of defiled mentality are subtle and do not become gross objects of knowing in ordinary experiences. However, it forms the subjective reference around which the six functional consciousnesses project and construct ordinary gross experiences. These projections in turn affirm the defiled sense of 'I'.

(3-8) Functional consciousness (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*): Mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*) and the five sense consciousnesses constitute the six functional consciousnesses. These consciousnesses arise as projections from the sphere of experience of *ālaya-vijñāna*. Ācārya Mañjuśrīmitra explains:

> By the power of formations (*saṃskāra*), the subtle (*ālaya-vijñāna*) is obscured and does not appear vividly, which gives rise to specific cognitive projections (*vijñāpti*). (Trans. 2001, p. 117)

These projections are ways of differentiating and knowing specific aspects from the sphere of experience that remains largely obscured. The examples for these specific aspects are forms and colours for eye consciousness, or images and concepts for mental consciousness. The ripening of karmic tendencies (*karma-bīja*) leads a person to project and follow specific aspects. Karma causes one to develop interest (due to afflictive emotions like attachment, aversion and closed minded ignorance) towards a specific aspect of this projection, which in turn leads one to modify the projection. Karmic tendencies lead to these afflictive emotions with the intent to protect or enrich the identity established by the defiled mind. One fabricates the ordinary realm of experience (*saṃsāra*) by following after and concretizing various projections. The sphere of experience of *ālaya-vijñāna* with its accumulation of *vāsana* and karmic tendencies provides the basis for such functional projections to arise continuously. The functional consciousnesses are so called because they are entangled with and work towards bringing forth an objectified world. They are localized in the sense that one makes objectified projections of specific aspects, while

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no more remaining conscious of the rest of the sphere of experience. Thus one remains unaware of the experience of *ālaya-vijñāna* when functional consciousnesses dominate.

The *ālaya-vijñāna* and defiled mentality are regarded as stable because their ever-changing continuum is present at all times. The functional consciousnesses are unstable because they arise and subside contextually. For example, the six consciousnesses are dormant during dreamless deep-sleep. The coordination between the six functional consciousnesses is established through the *vāsana* and karmic tendencies that continually modify the basis of projections—that is, the *ālaya-vijñāna*.

It may be noted that the six functional consciousnesses are always dualistic in nature. These cognitive projections arise with the three spheres of knower, known and knowing. In contrast, *ālaya-vijñāna* is non-dualistic from the point of view of the object-subject division. Depending on the context of experience, *ālaya-vijñāna* appears with the multiplicity of phenomenal distinctions. It can also fade out into an appearance of a unified stratum in certain states of experience.

In the *Precious Treasury of the Meaning of Words* (Trans. 1989) Longchen Rabjampa clarifies the distinction between various terms like *ālaya-vijñāna*, *ālaya* and *dharmadhātu* appearing in scriptures of *sūtra* and *tantra*. He reveals the structure of personality more deeply. *Dharmadhātu* is the term for reality 'as it is' (*tathātā*) or the 'void sphere of reality'. All-ground (*ālaya*) is the unawakened (unenlightened) nature of a person and forms the foundational stratum for the continuity of *vāsana* and karmic tendencies. *Ālaya* arises when a person has root-ignorance (*avidyā*) of not comprehending the true nature of all phenomena. It modifies itself through the accumulation of *vāsana* and karmic tendencies. Longchen Rabjampa further divides *ālaya* into four aspects to illuminate its structure. These include (i) the all-ground of primordial nature (of root-ignorance) (Tibetan: *ye don gyi kun gzhi*) (ii) the all-ground of application (Tibetan: *sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*), (iii) the all-ground of various *vāsana* (Tibetan: *bag chags sna tshogs pa'i kun gzhi*) and (iv) the all-ground of bodily *vāsana* (Tibetan: *bag chags lus-kyi kun gzhi*). Of these, the first is about the co-emergence of root-ignorance with any sprout of awareness. The second and third are related to how the karmic tendencies and *vāsana* further shape up the structure of personality. A person associates with the sense organs and bodily structure to form a stable reference to experience, from birth to death. The stable structure of *vāsana* that forms one's specific cognitive structure from birth to death is the fourth category. *Ālaya-vijñāna* is the aspect of being conscious of the sphere of experience constrained by *ālaya*. According to Longchen Rabjampa, if *ālaya* is like a mirror, *ālaya-vijñāna* is like the luminous clarity of the mirror, and the functional consciousnesses are like the arising of reflections in the mirror (Trans. 2002).

Afflictions and psychological states

The constraints of the ordinary psyche and the resulting psychological traits are studied in terms of the five root afflictions (*kleśa*) and their derivatives. The

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combinations of these afflictions result in various limiting psychological states. In Buddhism, the primary perspective to afflictions is not social ethics, but their potential to produce a state of suffering in a person. The root afflictions have a correspondence with the five aggregates. These afflictions are aggravated forms of distortions in relating to the world through the underlying capabilities of the aggregates.

The affliction related to the aggregate of form is bewilderment (*moha*), which makes one unable to engage with an object with single pointed concentration. One gets disinterested through distractions, becomes satisfied with a certain depth of knowing, gets confused through the multiplicity of appearances or remains afraid of deeper levels of truth. Thus one keeps wavering away from one object to another, without penetrating the appearances. Bewilderment can also be in relation to the mental objects of concepts, when one is unable to penetrate into the deeper layers of understanding.

The affliction of pride (*māna*) is related to the aggregate of feeling. Pride is an ego-centred approach where one looks for an enriching pleasurable sensation within the ego-boundary. One remains contented with ego-centric pleasures and fails to develop an appreciation of the interdependence of the entire sphere of experience. Attempts to enrich the pleasurable feeling within the ego-boundary as an isolate—without an overall enrichment of the entire sphere of experience—are not sustainable due to its interdependent nature. Intoxication (*mada*) is a related affliction, where one is overwhelmed with pleasure and remains too complacent to produce conditions for the sustenance of that pleasure.

The aggregate of perception has its associated affliction as attachment (*rāga*). In Buddhist terminology, attachment is differentiated from love and likeness. Attachment is the clinging to an object of experience with an exaggerated perception of its qualities. While focusing on a quality of the object, if one fails to discern the numerous supporting conditions that bring about its attractiveness, one mistakenly clings to the object as if it possesses the quality from its own side. One also fails to see the many alternate conditions that would have made the same object repulsive. This leads to clinging to the object for what it is not. One cultivates undue expectations and thus undergoes suffering due to attachment.

The root affliction of jealousy (*irṣya*) is associated with the aggregate of formation. It arises as the result of aggressive pushes of karmically driven actions. With the mistaken notions of ego-boundary the person begins to compare the immediate results of actions with those of others, leading to jealousy. Thus the person loses focus on the basic intent behind the action, that is, the intent to move away from suffering towards happiness. It also leads to competitiveness (*mātsarya*) as the focus shifts to comparison of narrowly created concepts of results instead of genuine happiness. Thus one constructs greater suffering through narrow-sighted actions.

The affliction of hatred (*dveṣa*) is associated with the aggregate of *vijñāna*. Hatred is the aggravation of mental turbulences that distorts and clouds the faculty of knowing. This is the result of the perturbed nature of contextual knowing

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(*vijñāna*), undergoing turbulent changes in its context. When the ego-identity is threatened in the face of an experience, the attempt to protect that identity arises strongly. It leads to unwholesome action and suffering. An unperturbed knowing may be compared with the surface of a still pond that reflects objects like a mirror. If a stone falls into the still pond, ripples appear at the surface and the sediments float up, turning the water muddy. The perturbed pond reflects the objects with distortion and lack of clarity along with added colours. Similar distortions happen to the process of knowing, when inflicted with hatred.

Buddhist psychology categorizes all ordinary modes of existence with their gross afflictions, into a psychological realm called the desire realm (*kāma-dhātu*—sphere of experience of desires). It is possible to cultivate states free of such gross afflictions through one-pointed meditation that calms the mind. However, such states of meditative absorption (*samādhi*) do not irreversibly transform the mental continuum. It still remains a fertile ground for afflictions which arise once the person comes out of the meditative absorption. The psychological realms corresponding to these states of *samādhi* are the form-realm (*rūpa-dhātu*—sphere of experience of forms free from gross projections) and the formless-realm (*arūpa-dhātu*—sphere of experience devoid of forms).

The desire realm is further classified into six sub-realms of psychological traits, based on relative dominance of one or the other affliction. One way of understanding the sub-realms is to consider them as six personality types among humans. In this categorization, the ordinary human psyche with a more or less balanced mixture of the five afflictions is one of the types. When any one of the afflictions dominates strongly over the others, the person belongs to the other five types. Over time, one could change the habitual tendencies and drift from one type to another. However, these variations are limited because of the stability provided by the all-ground of bodily *vāsana*.

A grosser shift in the psychological attitude comes up during rebirth. The continuum of a person during rebirth can undergo drastic changes in the way one relates to the world. This is because the stability provided by the all-ground of bodily *vāsana* is affected during death. The re-structuring of the all-ground of bodily *vāsana* happens in accordance with the psychological type acquired through the specific mixture of the five afflictions. This can lead the mental continuum to a sphere of experience completely different from human experience. The Buddhist scriptures mention five other sub-realms of being, namely, *sura-loka*, *asura-loka*, animal-realm (*paśu-loka*), *preta-loka* and *naraka-loka* in addition to human-realm (*nara-loka*). These correspond to the aggravated levels of pride, jealousy, bewilderment, attachment and hatred respectively. These depict the many different ways in which a person (a sentient being[18]) can bring-forth and relate to the world. These realms are experiences of the same sphere of reality with differing *vāsanas* and karmic tendencies of the beings.

The *ālaya* provides an ever-changing, but stable context for a person to relate to the world consistently in one of these realms. The defiled mentality and functional consciousnesses work in tandem with *ālaya-vijñāna* to provide this stability,

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by concretizing the sphere of experience. This stability is disturbed during death. The structure of *ālaya* and the eight collections dissolves during the process of dying, resulting in the dissolution of the structure of experience. The experiential states in the intermediate state between death and rebirth are narrated by Guru Padmasambhava (Trans. 1975). This corresponds to the process of the restructuring of the *ālaya* and the eight collections; and thus the emergence of a new structure of experience for the continuum of the person. The defiled mentality, with its clinging to the idea of self, plays a vital role in the process of rebirth. The defiled mentality undergoes a struggle to re-establish one's identity. This struggle leads to an identification of the self with certain experiences that arise in the person's continuum. This leads to the process of concretization and re-stabilization of the *ālaya* centred around such experiences. This centring is usually by habitual identification, rather than through any conscious choice. This process has a striking similarity in its dynamics with the concept of attractors in the theory of non-linear dynamics.

Psychology of transformation

The models of personality introduced above, can be applied in studying the psychology of transformation. Distinctions between the subtler experiential states of *samādhi*, liberation (*vimukti*), stages on the path to full awakening (*saṃbodhi*) etc., can be understood with the help of these models. Buddhism does not consider *samādhi* states as liberation from suffering, because these do not result in the irreversible transformation of the basis of suffering. Such a transformation is possible only through cultivating insight (*prajñā*) about the actual mode of existence of a person.

A person accesses the states of meditative absorption (*samādhi*) through subduing the five afflictions and cultivating the mental episodes of one-pointed concentration (*ekāgratā*). Eight major levels of *samādhi* states are identified, of which the first four are categorized as form-realm and the remaining as formless-realm. The *Surangama-samādhi-sūtra* is one of the sources with detailed descriptions of these realms and their sub-realms (*Surangama-samādhi-sūtra*, 2003). In summary, the form-realm presents the experience of vivid appearances of ephemeral forms with reducing levels of grasping, and an absence of explicit suffering.[19] *Ālaya-vijñāna* becomes the dominant level of consciousness as the person progresses through various form-realms. The functional consciousnesses and the *ālaya* are secondary.

In the formless-realm states, *ālaya-vijñāna* and the functional consciousnesses tend to become increasingly dormant and *ālaya* dominates. In these states, distinctions and comprehension weaken. The experiences are like a vast undifferentiated space (*ākāśa-ananta-āyatana*), like a vast consciousnesses devoid of even the objective perception of space (*vijñāna-ananta-āyatana*), a perception of the lack of any perceivable phenomena (*akincana-āyatana*) and a complete subsiding of consciousness as 'neither perception, nor non-perception' (*naiva-saṃjñā na-asaṃjña-āyatanam*). In the last of the above, *ālaya-vijñāna* and the functional consciousnesses are completely dormant, while the person continues with all the *vāsana* and karmic

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tendencies dormant and intact in the *ālaya*. In Buddhism, the formless states are not regarded as desired results of spiritual practice. They lack both the omniscient quality of the enlightened state and the limited distinctions of ordinary beings. As the functional consciousnesses that help in getting down to specific aspects are dormant, cultivating insight is difficult in formless realm.

One who is liberated from suffering is called an Arhat. One progresses to the state of Arhat through the union of insight meditation (*vipaśyana*) and calm-abiding (*samatā*), by cultivating wisdom regarding the true nature of a person—*anātma*. An Arhat's *ālaya-vijñāna* undergoes a level of irreversible transformation that no more supports the sprouting of defiled mentality (*kḷṣṭa-manas*). The accomplishment is irreversible, since a mental continuum ripened with wisdom does not provide a suitable condition for the arousal of ignorance (*avidyā*). In the light of wisdom of *anātma*, an Arhat is no more pushed around by the winds of karma. This is to be contrasted with the reminiscent effect of *samādhi* that continues after meditation, but fades away over time. Though an Arhat has achieved freedom from the veil of afflictions (*kleśāvaraṇa*), the veil of knowables (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) is still present. Thus an Arhat's sphere of experience is still limited.

A person (*Bodhisattva*) on the path to complete awakening (*saṃbodhi*) needs to remove the veil of knowables in addition to veil of afflictions. Removal of all the stains of *vāsana* is essential for this. This can be achieved only through working with the projections of functional consciousness to actively modify *vāsana*. Thus the path of progress of a Bodhisattva is different from that of an Arhat. It requires compassionate engagement (*upāya*) with the world along with insight (*prajñā*) into the true nature of all phenomena. These two necessarily need to go hand-in-hand, since the realization of subtler levels of interdependence and enriched levels of compassion through post-meditational periods, and the realization of deeper levels of emptiness through meditation, support each other. Through gradual coalescing of meditative and post-meditative experiences, one completely wipes out stains of *vāsana*. This results in the irreversible abandonment of *ālaya* that structures experiences through past habits, and in a direct experience of truth 'as it is'. Then there is wisdom co-emergent with every sprout of experience. The eight-fold collection of the ordinary personality transforms into the pristine wisdom that is ever-fresh. Detailed descriptions of the stages on the path to liberation and complete awakening, and their relations with the models of personality, as described above, can be found in scriptures such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and the *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*.

Going beyond 'confusion'

The absence of recognition of the truth 'as it is', leads to the 'confusion' (*bhrānti*—the cognitive error) of seeing truth from a perspective—distorting and concretizing certain aspects, failing to see the rest, imputing layers of concepts, etc. The colouring of the sphere of experience is the first level of embodiment or grounding of awareness—in the form of *ālaya*. This is also the beginning of 'confusion'. The

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grounded perspective of a person does not remain the same over time. It undergoes change within a limited scope within a life-span, and restructures significantly between death and rebirth. The suffering and limited pleasures one undergoes are the result of this confusion. Confusion is the only basis for suffering. However, the ultimate nature of confusion is none other than that of awareness. It is merely a distortion of awareness resulting from the lack of recognition of the truth 'as it is'.

When one progresses in the path by working to eliminate the veils (*kleśāvaraṇa* and *jñeyāvaraṇa*), one recognizes the true nature of reality. *Ālaya* loses its support through this recognition (because *avidyā* is its necessary support). Aspects of pristine wisdom (*jñāna*) shine forth after this recognition. In the absence of conditioning through past experiences in the form of *vāsana* and karmic tendencies, this pristine wisdom is an ever-fresh awareness comprehending truth 'as it is'. There is nothing essentially pure and impure, except for confused perspectives making such distinctions through exaggerations. The five aggregates, the five root afflictions and the eight-fold collection are distorted perspectives to pristine wisdom. The five inseparable aspects of pristine wisdom are:

1. Pristine wisdom of discrimination (*pratyavekṣaṇa jñāna*),
2. Pristine wisdom that is mirror-like (*ādarśa jñāna*),
3. Pristine wisdom of equality (*samatā jñāna*),
4. Pristine wisdom of all-accomplishment (*kṛtyānuṣṭhāna jñāna*), and
5. Pristine wisdom of the void sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu jñāna*).

The 'pristine wisdom of discrimination' differentiates and understands all details of phenomena. It engages with the entire sphere of experience to distinguish details. It is the capability behind the aggregate of perception. In the absence of the confusion of grounded perspectives, the power of attachment is transformed into its purified form as correct discernment, through unbiased engagement without exclusions and exaggerations. Thus the aggregate of imputed perceptions dissolves in this pristine wisdom.

The 'pristine wisdom that is mirror-like' reflects the void sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu*) in its fullness, without getting perturbed into disturbing emotional states (through karmic tendencies) and habitual colouring (through *vāsana*). This is the aspect of unwavering clarity. This is the capability behind the aggregate of *vijñāna*. The grounded context that formulates *vijñāna* (qualified knowing) dissolves by the recognition free from confusion. The power that drives the affliction of hatred is transformed into its purified form as the power for unperturbed clear experience.

The 'pristine wisdom of equality' is the wisdom sensing the happiness and suffering of all beings with one-taste, transcending beyond the ego-centric feelings of suffering and limited pleasures. Due to the absence of confused identities with suffering and pleasure, this leads to an even-minded quality of compassionate all-rounded enrichment. The aggregate of feeling dissolves into the realization of this pristine wisdom. The power that drives the affliction of pride (*māna*), and the ego-clinging nature of enriching one's happiness, is transformed into an all-enriching attitude.

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The 'pristine wisdom of all-accomplishment' is the creative wisdom of a fully awakened being. It represents the power for spontaneous accomplishments (*anabhoga*) instead of being bound to karma driven actions. With the dawn of recognition, the aggregate of formation dissolves into this naturally accomplishing wisdom. The power that drives the afflictions of jealousy and competitiveness is released from its confused journey of aggression into that of effortless accomplishment.

The 'pristine wisdom of the void sphere of reality' is the experience of truth 'as it is'. The confused perspectives lead from this wisdom to concretized aspects as the aggregate of form. It is the same power of this wisdom that drives the affliction of bewilderment, when one diverts from the deeper investigation of the nature of truth, into confused identification with appearances. The comprehension of certain unchanging patterns within the ever-changing flux of appearances results in seemingly permanent forms. If one perfectly transcends bewilderment with insight (*prajñā*) and one-pointed concentration, one cuts through all appearances into the true nature of reality.

Similarly, the eight-fold collection of *ālaya-vijñāna*, and so forth, are confused presentations of pristine wisdom. The sense consciousnesses with its power to relate to the world through karma-driven projections are nothing but the power of the pristine wisdom of all-accomplishment, applied within the limited perspective of grounded cognition. The mental consciousness, with its power to conceptually analyse its object, is the distortion of the pristine wisdom of discrimination operating within the constraints of grounded perspectives. The defiled mentality with its subjective formulations is the confused display of the power behind the pristine wisdom of equality, trying to set a limited scope for moving from suffering to happiness. The *ālaya-vijñāna* is the confused display of luminous clarity of the mirror-like pristine wisdom, being coloured and perturbed by experiences of the past. The *ālaya* itself is the confused colouring of the pristine wisdom of the void sphere of reality, displaying forth as the limited sphere of experience.

On recognizing the true nature, confusion ceases. Various dimensions of awareness-potentials and capabilities are amalgamated into the ever fresh display of pristine wisdom of complete awakening. Nothing is abandoned—neither the experience of distinctions, nor the experience of wholeness; neither the experience of sensation, nor the creative potential of action. All these are coalesced into inseparable aspects of omniscient wisdom in the void sphere of reality. Going beyond 'confusion' (*bhrānti*), through developing the irreversible foundation of insight (*prajñā*), one transcends beyond the ordinary to this perfect and completely awakened state.

Conclusion

The three models presented above cover different ways of analyzing personality—in terms of the categories of experiences, the dynamics of mental continuum, and the context and structure of experiences. The five dimensions of capabilities show how all these models are connected together, and how the same faculties

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can manifest either as the distorted demonstrations of afflictions or as the purified presence of pristine wisdom. It reveals the ineffable potential pent up in every being, which can be unleashed to its spontaneous perfection by developing recognition. This recognition has to be cultivated through the focused application of method (*upāya*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) in its initial stages, and through spontaneous perfection of the inseparability of method and wisdom in its advanced stages. Buddhist psychology primarily addresses how to progress systematically from the ordinary state of being into the state of perfect recognition.

Elements from Buddhist psychology can also be studied and utilized for application in other facets of psychology. The network model of mental continuum and the view of *Madhyamaka* have already found their places in the research topics of psychology and cognitive science. The rest of the models remain largely untapped. The model of eight-fold collection presents a good psychological description of the process of sleeping, dreaming and dying. This can potentially be studied in correlation with scientific observations. This model also provides a suitable framework to study the psychology of transformation, and to map and correlate the experiences of practitioners from various spiritual traditions. The five dimensions of capability can provide a useful template for studying psychological afflictions in the scientific context. This would help in root-cause analysis of various psychological disorders, and in integrating that knowledge for the holistic transformation of a person.

Endnotes

1 The three scopes of motivation for Buddhist practice were pointed out by the sage and scholar Atīsa Dīpānkara Srijñāna in 'The Lamp to the Path to Enlightenment' (*Bodhipatha-pradīpa*). These include the lower motivation of good rebirths (that of relatively low levels of suffering), the middle motivation of liberation from cyclical existence and the higher motivation of complete and perfect awakening as an omniscient knower.

2 The Buddhist term *nirvāṇa* is used in two contexts. Its lower scope is freedom from suffering (*vimukti*) and the higher is perfect and complete awakening (*saṃbodhi*). Commonality is that both of these states are free from *saṃsāra*.

3 The distortions that arise when experiencing the truth from various frames of reference may be termed in modern terms as 'cognitive errors'. This concept is further explored in later sections of this chapter in relation to terms like obscuration to omniscience (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) and confusion.

4 The five aspects of pristine wisdom are mentioned by the Buddha in *kāyatrayāvatāra-sūtra*. The theme of these five aspects is detailed out further in *vajrayāna* teachings.

5 *Mahāyāna* (higher vehicle) refers to schools that focus on the higher scope of motivation—that of *saṃbodhi*. Many schools (like *Theravāda*) that primarily focus on the middle scope of lower *nirvāṇa*—that of *vimukti*—accepts only the first turning sutras.

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6 *Prajna-pāramita* tradition refers to the scholastic tradition followed in the ancient universities of India like Nalanda, Vikramaśila and Oḍaṇḍapuri. This is also the tradition followed by Tibetan Buddhism. *Vajrayāna*, the tantric tradition of Buddhism is regarded to be part of this.

7 The phrase 'continuum (*santāna*) of a person' is used in Buddhism to refer to the person as an ever-changing stream of various aggregates. It also makes it explicit that person does not refer to a monolithic entity. A related term is mental continuum (*citta-santāna*) that refers to mind as an ever-changing stream of various mental episodes.

8 The Sanskrit word used for person is *pudgala*, meaning embodied being. In the Buddhist context, the discussions on psychological models apply not only to human beings, but also to all other sentient beings. Also see endnote 18.

9 *Abhidharma-kośa* (Treasury of higher knowledge) is an ancient text by the Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu detailing Buddhist teachings as understood by the *Sarvāstivādin* school of Sanskrit *Hinayāna* tradition.

10 *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (Compendium of higher knowledge) is an ancient text by the Buddhist yogi-scholar Asanga detailing *Abhidharma* teachings from a *Yogācāra* perspective.

11 *Manas* is introduced and discussed in the section, 'Model 3: The eight-fold collection'.

12 Asanga in his treatise named *Bodhisatva-bhūmi* (part of *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*) states 'the appearance of objects is known as *vijñāna*' and 'the first conceptualization of these [appearances] is known as *citta*'. The conceptualization (*vikalpa*) in this context relates to the basic imputation of the object of cognition through *vāsana* as explained later in this chapter in connection with emptiness and the context of experience. This is not the grosser conceptualization that forms various additional ideas about the object through the aggregate of formation.

13 This is clarified in the third turning through the phrase '*svacitta-dṛśya-vikalpa*' (conceptualized appearances to the mind) in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*. It does not mean that there is no basis to appearances other than mind. Such an interpretation leads to the mistaken view of the third turning as subjective idealism. It rather means, whatever 'appears" to mind is not truly existent outside mind. The truth 'as it is' that is beyond all conceptual elaboration is apprehended through limitations of *citta* as something else.

14 It may be noted that the three aggregates presenting subjective aspects, viz., feeling, perception and formations contribute to the mental episodes.

15 In this context, *samādhi* does not refer to its usual meaning associated with meditative absorption. It refers to the basic stability in mental engagement needed for ascertaining the qualities of an object correctly.

16 Insight meditation (*vipaśyāna*) is an integral part of Buddhist practice along with calm-abiding meditation (*śamata*).

17 The non-linear dynamics of a collection of similar karmic tendencies leading a person into pleasurable and painful states of experience are termed *puṇya* and *pāpa*. Such collections can build up exponentially due to mutual reinforcement and due to the fuel that the mind-stream provides to the tendencies continuously.

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18 Sentient being refers to a being with mind that can sense suffering and happiness. Also see endnote 8.

19 The Buddha pointed out that all-pervasive suffering of construction (*saṃskāra-dukhata*) is present even in the realms of form and formless experiences even though the explicit and gross suffering is absent. This is because these realms of experiences are constructed through many conditions. The struggle for construction is an implicit suffering that one may remain unaware of. In constructed states, one has to constantly struggle to generate supporting conditions. Or else, the state fades away upon exhaustion of supporting conditions like meritorious karma (as like a lamp going off on exhausting oil).

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11

The Sufi path of self-transformation

Bahman A. K. Shirazi

Islam: A brief introduction

Islam is one of the largest and fastest growing world religions. It began with the prophetic vision of Mohammad approximately 1,400 years ago in the Arabian Peninsula and spread at an astonishing rate throughout the Old World. It spread north to Syria, Anatolia, and to the Caucus Mountains and beyond into southeastern Europe. It moved south and west through Egypt and North Africa into Andalusia in Spain. In the northeasterly direction, it spread into Persia and Central Asia and western China, and east into northern India. By sea it spread to the west coast of India and as far as Indonesia and other Southeast Asian island nations.

Islam has thus become an important force not only in terms of religious principles and practices, but also as a vehicle for cultural exchange worldwide. Although some aspects of the original Arab culture such as language, art and architecture greatly influenced other cultures, wherever Islam spread, in turn, local cultures contributed to the fabric of Islam with their own cultural heritage to create a unique expression as well as distinct forms of religious practice and rituals. Today there is a tremendous range of cultural forms unified by the same set of Islamic religious principles and beliefs.

Islam teaches that there's only one God/Ultimate Reality (*Allah*) and nothing is ultimately real but God. God is neither born nor gives birth, that is, it is not a sentient being. It is self-existent and self-sufficient, and all creation depends on God. It permeates all creation, but no single sentient being can be equal to God in entirety. God is both without and within all beings, and thus can be found at the innermost centre of all human beings. In this way, all humans are equal with respect to God. Human beings are uniquely positioned with special potential to consciously experience their unity with the creator. However, many human beings live in a state of sleep-like ignorance (*gheflat*) and are unconscious of their essential oneness with God. Most are born in this state of ignorance, live and die in such a state. However, human beings can exercise their free will and perfect themselves through a process of psychospiritual transformation with distinct stages through which they first use their free will to purify themselves,

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and surrender themselves to God's will and ultimately experience God's power, knowledge and beauty directly.

Islam literally means 'peaceful surrender' in Arabic. This refers to the process of yielding of human will to the Divine Will, and ultimately the reconciliation and the unification of the two. The agency of human will is called the *nafs* (self) which is the principle of embodiment of spirit and the immediate experience of the ordinary human being in the world; the *nafs* is of this material world. *Nafs-al-ammarah* (the commanding self) is the human agency of organization, control, volition and action in the world. The human *nafs* is the product of the evolutionary process on Earth and is composed of several evolutionary sub-layers—the inorganic/mineral, the organic/vegetable and the animal layers. However, the journey of the soul does not stop here. When an individual is ready and with God's grace, the journey of spiritual transformation begins and the *nafs* continues to transform first into the 'regretful self', before turning into the 'inspired self', and finally the 'serene/secure self'. The process of spiritual transformation involves seven classical stages—awakening, abstinence, non-attachment, spiritual poverty, patience, God-reliance and joyous certitude.

Islam: Exoteric and esoteric

Sufism has often been referred to as the heart or soul of Islam, or in other words, it is the esoteric dimension or inner territory of Islam. According to Ibn Al-Arabi, the great Andalusian Sufi master, Islam consists of four dimensions or layers. The exoteric dimension, or the outer layer, is known as *sharia* (literally meaning a road). *Sharia* is a set of relatively fixed rules and guidelines for the average Muslim. The *sharia* is a collection of principles and practices that govern the day-to-day life of Muslims. The ordinary Muslim is expected to follow the rules of *sharia* as a driver follows a road without deviating. The basic requirements for all Muslims are—belief in unity of Allah and prophecy of Mohammad as God's messenger, daily prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadhan, charitable acts, and if possible pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

The *sharia* is analogous to the crust of the earth or the surface terrain which is solid. Below this terrain is the esoteric realm, or the inner terrain. The next layer is *tarigha*, which literally means a path, like a trail in the forest or in the desert, which is not pre-established and requires the expert knowledge of a guide to traverse. When one enters the *tarigha*, he or she is initiated into a Sufi order with a help of a teacher (*sheikh*) who has experience and knowledge of the path. At this part of the journey the heart of the seeker is full of fiery passions and the journey full of trials and tribulations and involves the purification of the base nature of the *nafs* (embodied self) through the opening of the spiritual heart and the alchemy of transformation. It results in purification and removal of idiosyncratic illusions and development of truth consciousness. The *tarigha* may be likened to the hot magma layer beneath the earth's crust, which is hot and fluid as is the fire in the heart of the seeker.

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The third layer is that of a higher spiritual consciousness called *haghighat* (Truth-consciousness). Like the huge solid mantle of the earth, *haghighat* is stable and unshakable faith and perfection of Truth-consciousness. The innermost core of Islam is known as *ma'rifa* (Gnosis), which refers to direct knowledge and love of the Divine. Just as little is known about the core of the Earth, to the seeker this part of the journey is a mere mystery, the secret of all secrets. Only persistence, patience and absolute purity of the heart and soul and total sincerity could bring the seeker into direct union with God consciousness.

Sufism in India

Sufism is the esoteric or inner dimension of Islam, and not a branch of exoteric Islam. Scholars trace the root of the term Sufi to *suf*, a woolen garment worn by some early Sufis. Some argue that the term is related to the Arabic word '*saafi*', meaning purity. Various Sufi orders do not differ with the exoteric traditions, and with one another, in terms of the basic tenets and practices of Islam. Origins of Sufism go back to the 8th century CE, when the first known Sufis lived. Sufi orders began to be established by 12th and 13th centuries, and historically developed more or less as a matter of geographic location as Islam spread throughout the world. Many of the orders were further sub-divided into branches, but most trace their background to the following orders (discussed below)—all of whom trace their heritage ultimately to Prophet Mohammad.

The *Ahmadi* (*Badawi*) and *Burhani* orders were both founded in Egypt. The *Shadhili*, *Sanusi*, and *Tijjani* orders have followers in North Africa, Arabia and Syria. The *Yasawi*, *Mawlawi*, *Jerrahi* and *Bektashi* orders are centred in Turkey. The *Rifai*, *Kubrawi* and *Qadiri* (known as the first Sufi order) orders originate in Mesopotamia. The *Ni'matullahi* and *Owaysi* orders were founded in Iran. The *Suhrawardi* order originated in Iran and spread to India, where it gained more prominence and split into a number of branches. The *Naqshabandi* is a major Sufi order, which became popular in Central Asia, Kurdistan and the Indian subcontinent. The *Chisti* order was founded in India by Khawja Mu'in al-Din Hassan Chisti (1142–1236 CE), whose shrine is visited by millions of people every year. Sufism was brought to Europe and America by the great Indian Sufi master, Hazrat Inayat Khan, in the 1910s and 1920s from the *Chisti* tradition, bringing the message of 'love, harmony, and beauty' to the West.

Islam spread to India as Arabs began settling on the Indian west coast of Kerala as early as the eighth century, which is much earlier than the time of the invasion of India from the north by Mahmud Ghazni in 1001 CE. The development of Sufism in India has a highly distinctive feature, in that Islamic mysticism has been influenced by Indian mysticism throughout the centuries. This amalgamation was so deep that, according to Peter Hardy (1983, p. 41), 'After the death of a great Sufi shaikh, his tomb could become a place of pilgrimage for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.' The greatest confluence of Sufism and Hinduism can be found in the teachings of Meher Baba, who was initiated by five spiritual

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masters—two of whom, Hazrat Babajan and Tajuddin Baba, were Sufi masters. In the book, *God Speaks*, Meher Baba (2001), who attempted to unite all the major religions, brings together a comprehensive comparative presentation of Sufism and Hinduism, demonstrating the essential oneness of these two and other major world spiritual traditions.

Essentials of Sufi psychology: *Nafs*, heart and soul

Sufism offers a comprehensive approach to sacred psychology with the ultimate aim of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. The collective experience and knowledge from Sufi practice makes available to us today a thorough understanding of who we are as human beings and what the purpose of our embodied existence here on Earth is. It reveals to us the principal aspects of our nature and a way to transform our selves to become true instruments of manifestation of Divine love, Divine consciousness and Divine action.

Based on the experiences of numerous seekers and masters, Sufism offers one of the most complete road maps for the stages of transformation of consciousness. Each seeker (*salek*) travels a unique path suited to his/her unique personality characteristics and spiritual potential. It is possible, however, to speak of general stages of the transformation of consciousness in terms of the stations of the *nafs* and key challenges and attainments of each stage. The journey from our mundane surface awareness to the depths and heights of self-consciousness involves a process of transformation of personality and consciousness that may be described in terms of seven stages of psychospiritual transformation.

In the context of spiritual growth and development the term transformation may refer to a shift in locus of consciousness, emotional patterns, sense of identity, or an aspect or total configuration of personality, and even physical nature or characteristics. As form expresses essence or function, transformation allows for expression of a truer essence and a new level of functionality. The term 'psychospiritual transformation' highlights the importance of the psychological dimension in the overall process of spiritual transformation. It refers to transformation of consciousness by means of psychological insight. Insight into our emotional nature may help purify our emotions and emotional attachments. This may result in our increased ability to identify with higher spheres of consciousness. Insight into the nature of our phenomenal self or *nafs* is essential in the process of psychospiritual transformation.

Three principal aspects of the human being and their relationship comprise the triadic foundation of Sufi psychology: the *nafs* (self), *ghalb* (heart) and *ruh* (soul). Sufis believe that the spiritual heart is the agent of reconciliation between the physical and metaphysical dimensions of the human being. The spiritual destiny of each human being depends on whether the soul, or *nafs*, becomes the eventual winner of the inner battle (*jihad*) between the tendencies exercised by the *nafs* and the higher qualities of the soul. If the *nafs* dominates, the heart becomes darkened and weakened and ineffective. If the forces of the soul take over the

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heart, it becomes transparent and illumined. To know the real depth of the human being means to know intimately and masterfully these three parts and to be able to harmonize and unify them.

Nafs

Nafs is simply the equivalent of the English word 'self'. It has often been translated as 'ego' or 'lower self' both of which are somewhat inaccurate. The term ego, as used in Western psychological discourse, is hardly an equivalent of this term. The ego is generally a hypothetical construct which has a different definition and function in each school of psychology. *Nafs*, however, is not an abstract or theoretical concept—it is a lived, organic reality which could be experienced in day to day life situations. The *nafs* is essentially the embodiment principle and has a unique formation and developmental process in each individual. It is the agency of will in the human being and is the product of bio-psycho-social development. *Nafs* is also not just the lower self, but when qualified, it refers to all stages of self as it undergoes transformation. According to Frager (1999, p. 3), 'in Sufi psychology the self, or *nafs*, is an aspect of the psyche that begins as our worst adversary but can develop into an invaluable tool.'

It is possible to speak of the *nafs* in terms of seven levels. *Nafs al-ammarah*, *nafs-al-lawwamah*, *nafs-al-molhamah* and *nafs-al-motmaenah* refer to the four basic levels of the self. *Nafs-ammarah* (the commanding self), encompasses three levels of the *nafs* prior to the human self in evolutionary terms. These are:

- The mineral/ inorganic self (*nafs al-jamaadi*),
- The vegetable/organic self (*nafs-al-nabaati*), and
- The animal self (*nafs-al-haywaani*)

As the principle of embodiment, the human self is the crown of the evolutionary process, presiding over the animal self, vegetable self and the mineral self.

Table 11.1 summarizes in one glance, the triune nature of human consciousness—the *nafs*, the heart, and the soul in correspondence to seven universal planes of consciousness. These are, in order of higher to lower density—inorganic, vital, mental, rational, intuitive, Truth Consciousness (*Haggh*) and Unitary Consciousness (*Tawheed*). The self (*nafs*) finds multiple expressions corresponding to all of these planes.

The commanding self (*nafs-al-ammarah*), though intelligent in worldly ways, generally lacks spiritual wisdom. According to Shafii (1985, p. 49), 'indulgence in animal desires...and enslavement in habits are the core of ignorance and veiling'. Desires operate at the various sub-levels of self. The mineral-self generates inertia; the vegetative-self creates desires for food and inactivity; and the animal-self is the source of both sexual and destructive tendencies. *Nafs-al-ammarah* seeks material objects, power, and is plagued with various other ego-desires and narcissistic tendencies.

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State of Consciousness	Self (*Nafs*)	Heart (*Ghalb*)	Soul (*Ruh*)
inorganic	mineral (*nafs aj-jamaadi*)		mineral
vital+inorganic	vegetable (*nafs al-nabaati*)		vegetable
mental+vital+ inorganic	animal (*nafs al-haywaani*)		animal
rational+mental+ vital+inorganic (intelligence/passions)	personal (*nafs a-ammarah*)	physical heart	human
heart/intuition/ intellect	regretful (*nafs al-lawwamah*)	spiritual heart	individual
truth/inner consciousness	inspired (*nafs al-molhamah*)	inner heart	secret
unity/gnosis/inner-most consciousness	secure/certain (*nafs al-motma-ennah*)	innermost heart	secret of secrets

Table 11.1: Seven planes of consciousness and the corresponding stations of the self, heart and soul.

The *nafs* often craves worldly objects and ignores the wisdom of the heart which is the medium of transmission of the knowledge of the soul. The *nafs* needs spiritual guidance to awaken to its spiritual potential from the state of sleep-like ignorance (*gheflat*). In Sufi practice, it has long been known that spiritual transformation necessitates opening of the heart as the first order of the work. Through the wisdom of an open heart, an individual is capable of self-love and self-compassion, qualities that are crucial to a non-judgmental approach to self-knowledge.

Heart

Sufism has frequently been referred to as the path of the heart. This is true, and a distinctive way of referring to this great tradition, but it is not the whole truth. Sufism has also developed one of the most complete teachings and practices for understanding and knowing the self, its growth and evolution in the context of the human psychospiritual developmental process. While focusing on the *nafs* and its relationship to the heart, Sufism never loses sight of the presence of the soul and its ultimate role in the human destiny. To make real progress in self-knowledge, one must encounter and discover the *nafs*, but the *nafs*, being extremely intelligent, is never capable of the kind of sincerity needed to see through its own makeup. The heart is the wisest place to start. Javad Nurbakhsh (1992, p. 71) writes:

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> The heart is a city between the domain of Unity (spirit, *ruh*) and the land of multiplicity (*nafs*). If the heart snaps the cord linking it with the *nafs*, it falls under the sway of the spirit; that is to say, it becomes heart in the true sense of the word, polished clean of the corrosion of multiplicity. On the other hand, if the heart becomes dominated by the *nafs*, it becomes darkened by the tarnish of the *nafs*' multiplicity, taking on its hue.

Four stations of the heart have been identified by the Sufi master Tirmidhi—the breast or physical heart, the spiritual heart, the inner heart and the innermost heart (see Table 11.1). The breast or the physical heart corresponds to the commanding self (*nafs al-ammarah*), and its function is to purify the physical body by constantly circulating and purifying the blood. It is also known as the seat of duality of good and evil; and the moral conflict between the two. The spiritual heart, which is on a subtle plane, corresponds to the regretful self (*nafs al-lawwamah*). Its function is to purify unwholesome states of mind and emotions by providing their antidote (such as loving-kindness for anger). Opening of the spiritual heart is paramount to spiritual progress as ignorance of the *nafs* perpetually generates negative energies that can darken our consciousness.

It is a priority for Sufis to awaken their spiritual heart which needs to be integrated with the *nafs*. An open heart provides a loving and forgiving platform from which one can contemplate and discover the nature of our *nafs*. It will facilitate the transition from *nafs al-ammarah* to *nafs al-lawwamah* (the regretful *nafs*). As the *nafs* transitions to the stage of *nafs al-molhamah* (the inspired *nafs*), the heart arrives at another more subtle station, the inner heart. Finally, the heart is experienced at the deepest level of consciousness, the innermost heart, as the *nafs* transitions to its final station, the certain, serene and secure *nafs* (*nafs-al-motma'ennah*). Meher Baba (2000, p. 14) asserts:

> Open your heart by weeding out all desires and by harbouring only one longing—the longing for union with the ultimate Reality. The ultimate Reality is not to be sought in the changing things of the external environment but in one's own being. Every time your soul intends to enter your human heart, it finds the door locked and the inside too full of desires. Do not keep the doors of your heart closed. Everywhere there is the source of abiding bliss, and yet all are miserable because of desires born of ignorance. The goal of lasting happiness shines forth fully only when the limited ego, with all its desires, finds its complete and final extinction.

The role of the heart in the overall process of psychospiritual transformation is cardinal, as the heart is the reconciler of material and spiritual realities, and the gateway to the soul and to the final stations of consciousness. In Sufi practice the initial goal is to open the seeker's heart. The open heart first helps to transcend, and then, transform the *nafs*. As the *nafs* transforms, it no longer acts as a separative agent, but rather cooperates with further transformation of consciousness. Desires of the *nafs* give way to the desires of the heart, and finally there remains only one desire—desire to know God.

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Soul

Hazrat Inayat Khan (1972b, p. 153) wrote, 'It is the coming of the soul from its original place to manifestation and its returning again from manifestation to its original condition that makes life's journey.' According to Prophet Mohammad, human beings are the highest of creation. Each human being is a microcosmic expression of the macrocosm.

> It does not require a large eye to see a large mountain. The reason is that though the eye is small, the soul which sees through it is greater and vaster than all the things which it perceives. In fact it is so great that it includes all objects, however large or numerous, within itself. Or it is not so much that you are within the cosmos as that the cosmos is within you. (Meher Baba, 1974, p. 43)

The human soul (*ruh*) is the innermost dimension (*baatin*) of the human being and is hidden to the immediate consciousness of the ordinary individual as our surface consciousness (*zaaher*) is dominated by the activities of the *nafs*. All souls are formless and seek experience and expression as they enter the various planes of consciousness (Table 11.1). Hazrat Inayat Khan (1972a, p. 127) reveals that 'the soul is a current, yet one unlike the electric current we know on this physical plane, different from its power and phenomena; a current which is beyond time and space; a current which runs through all the planes of life.' Different souls, though identical in origin, are different in their experience and their state of consciousness. The ascent of the soul through various planes of consciousness is called transmigration or metempsychosis (*tanaasukh*).

When the soul is experiencing the inorganic state of consciousness (stone or metal), it is referred to as the mineral-soul or state of mineral selfhood and so on, as detailed in Table1. In the fourth stage after mineral, vegetable and animal stages, the human form is accomplished, which is the end result of the evolutionary process. The commanding self (*nafs-al-ammarah*) associated with this level is not yet spiritually awakened and is full of blemishes, impurities and unwholesome traits such as hypocrisy, selfishness, delusions, spite, envy and cruelty. The behaviours committed by the *nafs* stem from its own many layers of identity and identification—physical, emotional, mental, familial, social, professional, racial, national and historical dimensions of identity. All of the pre-human and human layers of *nafs* are considered veils or covers of the true self. Self-realization requires a gradual disidentification with, or unveiling of, all these conditioned identities to reveal the innermost layer, the true Divine Self.

It is at the next level when the spiritual heart is opened that the soul experiences wholeness and true individuality. The next two stations of the soul are referred to as the 'secret', and the 'secret of secrets', which are unknowable to the ordinary mind and are marked by oneness with Ultimate Truth and Unity with God or the over-soul, respectively. In its origin the individual soul is part of the over-soul or God, yet it is not conscious of its identity with God. Through its journey the soul moves through the various states of consciousness and experiences its identity with the various states.

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> The homeward journey of the soul consists in freeing itself from the illusion of being identical with its bodies—gross, subtle, and mental. When the attention of the soul turns toward Self-knowledge and Self-realization, there is a gradual loosening and disappearance of the *samskaras* that keep consciousness turned towards the phenomenal world. Disappearance of the *samskaras* proceeds side by side with piercing through the veil of cosmic illusion, and the soul not only begins to transcend the different states of the phenomenal world but also to know itself as different from its bodies. The spiritual path begins when the soul tries to find itself and turns its full consciousness toward Truth (God). (Meher Baba, 2000, pp. 225–226)

The term *samskāra* refers to mental impressions that are acquired through the mind and the senses associated with *nafs* and embodied existence. These impressions create numerous veils of illusion that keep human beings in the state of *gheflat* or sleep-like ignorance and unconsciousness. According to a traditional saying, 'there are seventy veils between the human being and God, yet none between God and the human being'. In Sufi practice the goal is to open the seeker's heart, which is the gateway to the soul. The open heart first helps to transcend and then transform the *nafs*. As the *nafs* transforms, it no longer acts as a divisive agent, but rather cooperates with further transformation of consciousness.

The Journey

Understanding the nature of the *nafs* and the modifications it undergoes in the process of psychospiritual transformation into the cosmic self, is at the core of the teachings in the Sufi tradition. Sufi practice begins with the first stage of psychospiritual transformation, spiritual awakening. Once the first stage is perfected (as demonstrated by a lack of recourse to the previous tendencies of the *nafs*), *nafs-al-ammarah* undergoes a gradual process of transformation known as *fana*, which means ego-annihilation or loss of self-centred personality characteristics.

As *nafs-al-ammarah* becomes modified and transformed, a new self is experienced. This is called *nafs-al-lawwama*. The term '*lawwama*' literally means 'blaming' or 'accusing'. *Nafs-al-lawwama* is perhaps best described (in functional terms) as self-in-transition, or regretful self. Regret is the result of the new consciousness, which reveals the imperfections of the *nafs* and the futility of its unconscious ways of being in the world. Many refined and mature human beings, whether Sufis or not, manifest the characteristics of *nafs-al-lawwama*, both in their inner life and outward behaviour. Such persons are decreasingly influenced by the tendencies of *nafs-al-ammarah*, and increasingly show the signs of higher emotions and subtler behaviours. A Sufi practitioner in the second stage, characterized by 'abstinence', actively avoids all forms of inferior impulses and tendencies by observing the ethical codes of the discipline (*adab*) until eventually the third stage, or 'non-attachment', is mastered.

It is crucial to distinguish abstinence (detachment) from non-attachment. While abstinence is required as an initial step, it does not automatically lead to

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non-attachment as the roots of craving still persist. Over-emphasis on abstinence may result in lopsided development, extreme asceticism and the development of a pious self which becomes judgmental and critical of others, which further separates one from the others. Sufism prescribes modesty in abstinence only with the goal of de-conditioning the *nafs* from its original habits and addictions.

By means of successive passages into the next two stages, 'spiritual poverty', during which the heart is perfectly purified and 'patience', longing for Divine grace, the practitioner attains the sixth stage, referred to as 'self-surrender', or 'reliance on God', through completion of which all tendencies of *nafs-al-ammarah* are eradicated at the root. Completion of the sixth stage also marks the cessation of all effort on the part of the individual. Beyond this point experiences of cosmic self and universal consciousness occur spontaneously, or by Divine grace. At the seventh and last stage, called 'contentment', the self takes on its final mode, *nafs-al-motma'enna*, which is characterized by joyful satisfaction and removal of all doubts.

Fana, or ego-annihilation, is also described in terms of a parallel process for an initiated seeker—annihilation of the ego first in the *sheikh* or teacher, and then in the Prophet Mohammad, and eventually in God or cosmic consciousness. At first a disciple undergoes a process of loss of self-identity through identification with the qualities of his or her teacher. Sufi practice, like those of other traditions, is best mastered under the guidance of a teacher. Just as ordinarily a lover at first loses his or her identity in that of the beloved, a sincere disciple is so impressed by the love and characteristics of a teacher that through observation and identification with the *sheikh* he or she becomes immersed in the virtues of the teacher. The *sheikh*, in the beginning, acts as a mirror through which the disciple gains insight into his or her characteristics of personality. Slowly the disciple observes the many virtuous qualities of the teacher and cultivates them.

If the teacher happens to be a Perfect Master, then he or she reflects the ninety-nine attributes of the Prophet Mohammad, who is known to the Sufis as a perfected human being (*ensan-al-kaamel*). The attributes of the Prophet are themselves nothing but the reflection of the ninety-nine attributes of Allah, or God. These ninety-nine perfections are the object of contemplation by Sufis at various stages of the practice. The practices of contemplation are generally called *zikar* (*dhikr*), and they take the form of chanting, movement or mediation exercises. Nurbakhsh (1990, p. 5) summarized the relationship between *dhikr* and self-development in the following way:

> ... *dhikr* is considered to be like a torrent which in addition to eliminating the undesirable qualities of the disciple and substituting Divine Attributes for them, in the final analysis effaces the individual ego in such a way that not a trace of the 'I' remains. This is the end of the Tarigha and the beginning of the sea of annihilation or *fana*.

According to Nurbakhsh (1990, p. 5), '...the goal of Sufism is knowledge of absolute reality, not as learned men explain it to us through logic and demonstrations but as it is in itself. This knowledge can be attained only by the "eye of the heart", that is, by means of illumination and contemplation'. Contemplation on Divine

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attributes is the final means of self-purification. From the Sufi point of view a perfected individual is one who has escaped the domination of *nafs-al-ammarah*.

As one approaches perfection, the *nafs* makes its final attempts to take control of the psyche. These re-appearances, despite their decreasing frequency, may be immensely difficult to withstand. That is why, until the final illumination, a certain degree of doubt as to the full annihilation of *nafs-al-ammarah* remains in the mind of the (by now) saint undergoing final transformation.

With the eventual disappearance of doubt the sixth stage of Sufi practice (self-surrender) is completed, and the last stage (contentment/joy) is attained. At this point the individual free-will is replaced by Divine Will. As mentioned earlier, the process of annihilation of the ego is known as *fana*. It takes place through successive stages of annihilation of the ego in the teacher (*fana-fe'sheikh*), in the Prophet (*fana-fe'rasul*), and in God (*fana-fe'llah*). However, *fana* has another process complementary to it, *baqa*. As Nurbakhsh (1990, p. 10) explained:

> Baqa consists of subsistence in God and is realized when God gives a new will to the disciple directly from himself, in order to replace that which had become annihilated in the course of the path... At this very advanced stage God does not veil the world from the Sufi, nor does the world veil God; no sort of separation exists any longer and duality is transformed into Unity.

Conclusion

This chapter was an attempt to provide a brief overview of Islam and its mystical dimension, Sufism. Emphasis was given to the psychological aspects of the process of spiritual transformation and the associated processes and stages of self-transformation merely in an outline fashion. There is much more that can be said about all the issues that were raised in this limited space. It is important to remember, however, that all that can be said in this manner makes only a map; the territory is the actual experience of the seeker and is always a unique process that cannot be moulded into any model or description however sophisticated. It is hoped that the map will simply provide an inspiration for the seeker of God.

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